

Melati Suryodarmo: Unpacked

Opening: 7 January 2023, 4pm

Duration: 7 January – 12 March 2023

Performance Lectures: 7 January 2023, 3pm and 13 January 2023, 5pm

Singapore, December 2022 – ShanghART Singapore is pleased to present, *Unpacked*, a solo exhibition by internationally-renowned performance artist Melati Suryodarmo. The exhibition opens on 7 January 2023 and runs through 12 March 2023.

The exhibition features independent curator Kimberly Shen as she engages Suryodarmo in dialogue, culminating in an exhibition introductory piece:

Unfolding through two performance lectures in a series of poetic actions and provocations, the artist unpacks from a suitcase dispatched from her home in Germany, the objects, relics and fragments of her past performances. The gallery space evolves through the performance lectures and is embodied by these objects, in a reconciliation of love, delusion, tragedy and the human condition.

The performance lectures revisit a selection of Suryodarmo's performances from the past two decades and unfold first in an ode to love, and secondly, a political lament. As tools to examine and scrutinise aspects of our existence, "objects are witnesses to the people who live with them", says Suryodarmo. As the artist performs and responds to these objects in a different time and context, they become displaced from their original meaning and intention, alluding to the ways we arrive and depart, move and shift through this transitory world.

Love, notes Suryodarmo, uncovers the most existential conditions of being human. In the first performance lecture, the artist employs the clichés and kitsch qualities of love, in a narration of love in all its joy and radiance, compounded by its inexplicable despair, alienation, self-effacement and denial. She sings the iconic, *Love Me Tender* (2001), as she slowly pumps black balloons, luring the audience into the surmounting tension and anticipation of the balloon's eventual explosion. Similarly, her earlier collaborations with Oliver Blomeier are sequences about love, hate and fate. Inspired by the life and love story of Austrian artist Egon Schiele, Suryodarmo and Blomeier move in slow motion against a stark red backdrop and on a shelf created by mentor Marina Abramovic, as they explore the subtle physical gestures based on a relationship between man and woman in *The Komodo Files* (2005). These contradictions of love are further documented in their collaborative performances, *Deformed Ethic of a Relationship 1.0* and *Deformed Ethic of a Relationship 2.0* (2005), in a gradual unravelling and progressive disintegration of a relationship. This introspection between self and others is conveyed through *Visible Undone Behaviour* (2005) as Suryodarmo observes her audience through a pair of binoculars, and writes her personal and immediate impressions. The act of voyeurism hints at a society that is disengaged and superficial; that we revel in being watched and unwatched.

Suryodarmo has consistently engaged with her cultural environment, drawing from the symbolic gestures and affective actions grounded by traditional Javanese rituals, to Japanese butoh. Known for a practice that traverses the East and West, Suryodarmo's second performance lecture reveals the fissures and disenchantment within personal and cultural politics. The durational performance of *Cruise Control* (2007) sees the artist running and jumping into a wall of earth in Solo, Indonesia, in a study of human behaviour, repetition and routine. *The Seed* (2008), performed in Western Europe, observes the artist wearing light-coloured pantyhose filled with black sesame seeds commonly found in Asia. The black seeds form grotesque island-like patterns of dark grey along her legs, recalling a body that is culturally and socially-displaced – in agony and in need of salvation.

The performative-objects represent poetic actions – spontaneous and abstract – as Suryodarmo intimates, much like the vibrant forms of a Wassily Kandinsky painting. In weaving her past performances, these objects function as personal anecdotes, inhabiting and punctuating the gallery space as the lectures unfold, prompting profound and visceral encounters to Suryodarmo's artistic oeuvre and somatic practice.

Kimberly Shen, December 2022

About the Artist

Melati Suryodarmo's (b. 1969) work is the result of ongoing research in the movements of the body and its relationship to the self and the world. These are enshrined in photography, translated into choreographed dances, enacted in video or executed in live performances. By conceptualising and translating some of these factors of presence that she recognises into her work, she intends to tease open the fluid border between the body and its environment, expressing her concerns about the cultural, societal, and political dimensions.

Melati Suryodarmo graduated from the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig, Germany under the tutelage of Marina Abramović and Anzu Furukawa with a Meisterschüler qualification in Performance Art. She is currently based in Solo, Indonesia and had presented her work at various international festivals and exhibitions across the world, such as the Kochi-Muziris Biennale: *In Our Veins Flow Ink and Fire*, Kochi, India (2022); *I'm a Ghost in My Own House*, Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, Netherlands (2022); *Why Let The Chicken Run?*, Museum MACAN, Jakarta, Indonesia (2020-2021), Bangkok Art Biennale 2020: *Escape Routes*, Bangkok, Thailand (2020); *Asia Society Triennial: We Do Not Dream Alone*, Asia Society Museum, New York, U.S.A. (2020); *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia (2019); *Arus Balik – From below the wind to above the wind and back again*, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art, Singapore (2019); *SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now*, National Art Centre Tokyo & Mori Art Museum, Japan (2017); *8th Asia Pacific Triennale*, QAGOMA, Queensland, Australia (2015).

Since 2007, Suryodarmo has been organizing an annual Performance Art Laboratory and Undisclosed Territory, a performance art festival, in Solo, Indonesia. In 2012, she founded Studio Plesungan. In 2017, she served as Artistic Director for the JIWA: Jakarta Biennale 2017. She was a finalist in the APB Foundation Signature Art Prize 2014 and is awarded the Bonnefanten Award for Contemporary Art (BACA) in 2022.

About the Curator

Kimberly Shen is a curator, arts practitioner and educator based in Singapore. Her artistic practice is multifaceted in approach, situated at the intersections of text and image, imbued by a feminist thinking and consciousness. She gravitates towards gendered gestures and vocabularies, in a mediation of pluralism and feminine subjectivities.

About ShanghART Gallery

ShanghART Gallery was established in Shanghai in 1996. It has since grown to become one of China's most influential art institutions and a vital player in the development of contemporary art in China, representing over 60 pioneering and emerging artists, including DING Yi, LI Shan, Arin RUNGJANG, Melati SURYODARMO, Apichatpong WEERASETHAKUL, XU ZHEN®, YANG Fudong, ZENG Fanzhi, and ZHAO Renhui Robert.

ShanghART Singapore was established in 2012 as the gallery's Southeast Asia wing, located in the contemporary art cluster Gillman Barracks. The gallery's first overseas space serves as a platform to introduce Chinese contemporary art to the region while developing collaborations with Southeast Asian artists and bringing them to the international art scene.

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ShanghART Singapore

Wednesday to Sunday, 12pm – 6pm,

other hours by appointment only

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